

# PARKNEWS



The E-magazine for Rosslyn Park supporters - special edition

## ANDY RIPLEY OBE

The papers and sports websites have been full of obituaries to the late, great Andy Ripley. This special edition of Parknews is not an obituary, but an attempt, however inadequate, to reflect upon, and celebrate the life of probably the greatest man ever to pull on the red & white hooped jersey. It is written by people who knew Andy and who felt moved to put their thoughts into words. There will be many reading this who are too young ever to have known and seen Andy: hopefully they will gain some understanding of what Andy meant to those whose lives he touched – and that is far from restricted to the Rugby field.

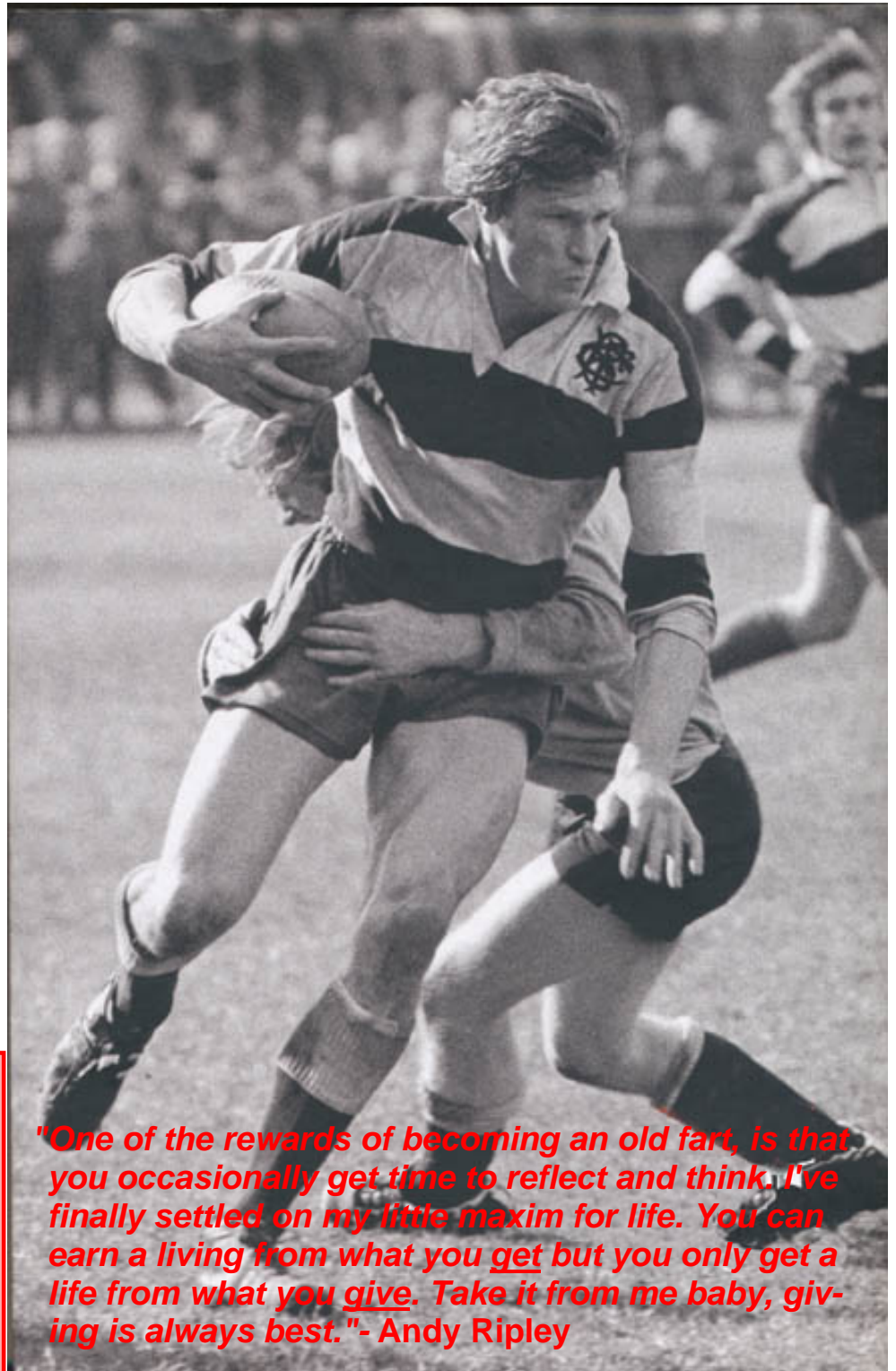
Andy was laid to rest at a private family funeral at 2:00PM on Friday 25th June. The family requested that those wishing to remember Andy should make a donation to the Prostate Cancer Charity rather than sending flowers (details below). There will be a public Memorial Service for Andy at Southwark Cathedral on 1st December, which would have been his 63rd birthday.

Andrew George Ripley was born in Liverpool on December 1 1947 and, on moving to Bristol, attended Greenway comprehensive school and then the University of East Anglia. His school had been exclusively soccer-playing and he only took up

Andy's family have asked that those wishing to remember Andy can make a donation [rather than sending flowers] to "The Prostate Cancer Charity" – Registered Number 1005541.

The Prostate Cancer Charity  
First Floor  
Cambridge House  
100 Cambridge Grove  
Hammersmith  
London  
W6 0LE.

Email: [info@prostate-cancer.org.uk](mailto:info@prostate-cancer.org.uk)



***"One of the rewards of becoming an old fart, is that you occasionally get time to reflect and think. I've finally settled on my little maxim for life. You can earn a living from what you get but you only get a life from what you give. Take it from me baby, giving is always best." - Andy Ripley***

**This gregarious, funny and self-deprecating polymath was a man of immense energy and imagination, and he kept on popping up in new guises – runner, rower, businessman, banker, academic, linguist. The list goes on. – Independent obituary**

rugby at university in the 1996-97 season when aged 19. Andy arrived at Rosslyn Park in 1969, recommended to Coach, Peter Berryman, by a contact at East Anglia University.

Former Park skipper, Barbarian and Club Chairman, **Geoff Bayles**, takes up the story, "As you may know I was the guy who first saw Andy swinging rugby boots asking if "Is this where you play Rugby?" at the Park. I remember how at the training session he quickly was elevated from sprinting with the Forwards to the Backs, all of whom he could beat over the pitch length. I also remember he went to South Africa as a very good player but came back as a very hard Lion in the following season, his best for us, and he should have had many more caps. Not very news-worthy but it really was a pleasure to play Rugby with him". Geoff doesn't mention that in this early season "trial" match, Andy Riley ran in four tries in the first half!

That irascible old Rosslyn Park character of a few seasons back, 'The Colonel' never tired of telling people that **he** discovered Andy playing in one of Park's many social teams – a recollection not universally shared – but the cantankerous old sage was probably onto a point when he said that the key to understanding Ripley's play was that he was an outstanding athlete who took up rugby and not the other way round. Indeed, **Peter Berryman** reports that his University contact, when asked about Rips, replied, Well, he's a long streak of \*\*\*\*, but if he doesn't take to Rugby then he'll probably run the 400 Hurdles for Britain in the Olympics!"

What is beyond dispute is that Rips spent his whole rugby career at Rosslyn Park, playing until he was 41. No one who saw him play is likely to forget his unique high stepping running style, long hair held in a head-band: a 6' 5" forward faster than most backs. His image as a leather-clad, biking hippy who played rugby ensured that he came to attention. One of his first representative honours was to be chosen for Mickey Steele-Bodger's XV: upon receiving the telegram informing him of his selection, Andy – who had never heard of this prestigious team - turned up at the Clubhouse, clad in leather motor-bike jacket and jeans, waving the telegram, "Hey, there's some guy called Bodger Steele wants me to play for him. Anyone know anything about it?"

### Cheap shot

The stories of Ripley-related incidents at Rosslyn Park are legion, but there are a couple that give a flavour of the man. Skipping the side against Wasps, Andy stood beneath the crossbar while the opposition took a penalty. The referee signalled that it had missed, but Andy knew it had passed between the posts and ran to the referee and told him so. It possibly cost Park the match, but Andy could not have done anything else. Or, when playing in a 7s against London Fire Brigade, one of the opposition sorted out Rips for a "cheap shot" off the ball. Asked afterwards why he hadn't thumped his assailant, Andy said, "It will make his day tomorrow to go on shift and say, 'I punched Andy Ripley yesterday' and it would have spoilt the effect if I'd given him a black eye".

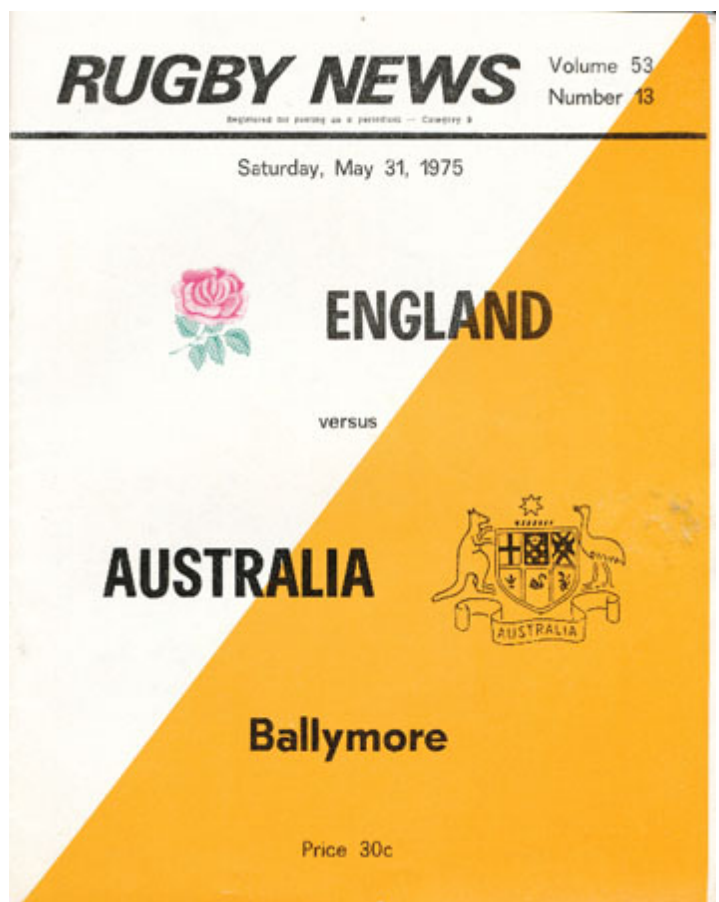
Mickey Steele-Bodger whom Andy had never heard of when summoned to play for his XV was, of course, also a driving force behind the Barbarians for whom Andy still holds the record of no less than 14 appearances.

Andy was always able to inject his special brand of anarchy. He was chosen to shipper either the Baa Baas or the British Lion midweek team (the memory fails as to which it was) but it had just become the vogue for players to gather in a cluster after running out onto the pitch. So when his expectant players formed a circle for his inspirational speech what did Rips say? To the utter disbelief of some battle-hardened internationals, he said "Tell you what, chaps, let's do *Ring A Ring o' Roses!*"

Andy went on to play for England, making his debut against Wales on 15 January 1972 and appearing in 24 test between then and 1976. He struck up an understanding with flanker Tony Neary and their inter-play enlivened an England side that was otherwise bereft of ideas ("A maverick character in a monochrome side", said a *Guardian* obituary). He first tasted victory in his fifth Test as an England player that June when they beat South Africa 18-9 in Johannesburg. His first England try came on 17 November 1973 in the 20-3 win over Australia at Twickenham. In 1974 he scored the winning try as England beat Wales at Twickenham for the first time in 14 years.

In 1973 Andy toured New Zealand with the England side that beat the All-Blacks. **Peter Berryman** recalls that the film star and Park member, Oliver Reed, had just bought the club its set of floodlights. The big switch on was the Wednesday after the England victory against the All-Blacks, when Park would play London Counties (if that doesn't sound much of a match, bear in mind the London team included the cream of the legendary London Welsh side of the Seventies, plus Wasps and Harlequins players). It was a rule that you couldn't play in the 1st XV if you didn't turn up for training, so Rips made a super-human effort and got back - jet lagged - just in time for Monday training. He wasn't selected!

Peter and his wife Gillian played a major role in Andy's life story, because it was they introducing Rips to Elisabeth, then working with them as an *au pair*, that led Andy to embark on more than 30 years of happy marriage. Alas Gillian also developed cancer and the two would meet to swap notes. Gillian passed away shortly before Andy, who deeply regretted being too ill by then to attend her funeral.



### A. G. RIPLEY (Rosslyn Park and Middlesex).

**No. 8. Born 1/12/47 at Liverpool. 6ft, 5in., 16st. 10lb.** Andrew George Ripley was educated at Greenaway Comprehensive, Bristol and at the University of East Anglia. He was qualified as a chartered accountant and has taken a degree in economics. He played soccer until he was 18 and is a canoeing instructor. He also plays basketball and has recorded some impressive times as a 400 metre runner and hurdler. He toured South Africa with England in 1972 after playing his first season of international Rugby and toured New Zealand with England in 1973. He also toured South Africa with the British Lions last year and has now been recalled after missing the match against Wales, 19 caps.

**“Dare we hope? We dare. Can we hope? We can. Should we hope? We must, because to do otherwise is to waste the most precious of gifts, given so freely by God to all of us. So when we do die, it will be with hope and it will be easy and our hearts will not be broken.”**  
**- Andy Ripley**



Dave Rollitt (right) with Andy Ripley (left) and Roger Uttley (centre). For England against Scotland

properly he could have been perhaps the greatest lineup forward of all time”.

Former Park Head Coach, **Dave Rollitt**, then a Bristol and England star was on the 1975 England tour to Australia with Rips and he and wife Shirley kindly sorted out some memorabilia that features in these pages, including the programme of the notorious “Battle of Ballymore” when England prop Mike Burton was sent off after 3 minutes. Dave recalls some typical Ripley stunts on the tour. Attending a reception, Rips swapped tour blazers with Peter Preece, the 5’ 9” Coventry centre. Flushed with success of this jape, Rips suggested they swapped passports at Passport Control - they both got through without a second glance.

Dave Rollitt played against Andy on several occasions and recalled, “You could tackle him, but he seemed to have knees and elbows everywhere! I never came off the field after playing him without having a number of bruises to show for it”.

Rips was scapegoated and unceremoniously dropped after defeat at Murrayfield during the whitewash year of 1976, “being jettisoned at his peak”, according to the official history of the Rugby Football Union.

‘He was hugely undervalued by England,’ said **Fran Cotton**, ex- England and Lions colleague. ‘They had no idea how to maximise his fantastic athleticism and superb line-out skills. Andy was the sort of amazing character that only rugby could produce in those days as well as one of the most intelligent men I ever met. We all loved him . . .’

Former England captain **Steve Smith** said, “To call him bohemian was an understatement. With his long hair, motorbike and powerful physique, he was like a rock star - a John Lennon with muscles. Everything about him was different, in the nicest possible way but Andy was always too nonconformist for the RFU. Instead of enjoying him, they saw him as a challenge.”

## Wrong Era

Sunday Times journalist, **Stephen Jones**, concurred, “He was a great player who played in the wrong era. England were absolutely abject at that time and with his ability, his athletic ability, if he had been launched

On one occasion, quite unbeknown to the RFU, the whole England team were “persuaded” to wear a sponsor’s boot in return for £50 a man. This gave Rips a problem, as former Park Secretary **Peter Thorley** recalls, “As Hon Sec, I had just negotiated a deal with Gola who had agreed to supply free a set of boots for the 1st XV squad and a large quantity of boots to the club for re-sale. At that time we were riding high and in two John Player Cup Finals, so the Park was receiving considerable exposure. For our part, the 1st XV were to wear them on match days and so too any Park player in an International. Step up, Andy! What does he do but run out at Twickenham in full view of the TV cameras, wearing one Gola boot & one Adidas one! Gola were furious and I had the raw end of the marketing manager’s wrath down the phone on the Sunday threatening to sue the club. Fortunately it all passed over peacefully. Andy, however only saw the funny side of it and saw it as a joke, which at the time I did not share. Dear, dear old Andy - a true character and a real free spirit, one who will truly be missed not only by his family and the Park but by the legions whose lives he touched. What a great loss at only 62. The nicest man I have known”. Andy, by the way, gave Adidas’ money to a children’s charity.

## Coach’s Nightmare

But Andy could be a Coach’s worst nightmare when the anarchist within him took over. On the England team bus approaching Cardiff the atmosphere was one of tense determination. The Coach had been round the bus saying to each player in turn, whilst pointing to a team mate, “See that man there - you’re playing for him today”. While the bus was stuck at a roundabout full of daffodils, Rips went round the bus putting his hand on the shoulder of each player in turn, pointing to the roundabout and saying in deeply motivational tones, “You see that daffodil there - you’re playing for him today...”

Andy went on the 1974 British Lions tour of South Africa, where the Lions were undefeated in 22 matches but Andy was kept out of the test XV by the great Mervyn Davies. It was a decision that was far from unanimously endorsed, and in his autobiography some



**“Legend is a word misused 99% of the time. Andy Ripley was a legend”.**  
**Wrexham Football Club website**

years later, Mervyn said that, “To him [Andy], rugby was just running, but with a ball in his hands. If he had been schooled in the game from an earlier age and had the tactical game that I had, he would have been an unstoppable force in the world game.” Was Rips disappointed? Asked about it many years later, he said “Disappointed? Into devastation and beyond.”

There are a legion of Ripley stories on that tour. One of the best concerned the tedious round of ambassadorial receptions, where Ripley was wont to turn up looking as if he had left his surfboard in the cloakroom, while wearing a T-shirt he'd had made saying “I'm so perfect it scares me”. He got a tongue lashing from tour manager, Alun Thomas, who warned him: “There's another official function on Friday. You will wear the tour blazer, grey trousers and tie. Don't dare turn up in anything else.” Ripley, did exactly as he was told, wearing blazer, grey trousers and tie - nothing else. No shirt, no socks, no shoes. **Mervyn Davies** recalled: “Alun turned a spectacular shade of red and immediately expelled him from the function and Andy left with a big smile on his face”.

Former England and Lions prop **Mike Burton** explained: “He and I got capped on the same day in 1972 and even then he hated having to dress up in his No 1's for the after-match dinners. He explained it like this, “After three years at the London School of Economics, I don't do blazers”.

South African journalist **Des Blow** got in touch to say “I was shocked to hear of the death of Andy Ripley while watching the England -Australian rugby match on TV and although I lost touch with Andy after the 1974 British Lions tour of South Africa which I covered as a feature writer for the Johannesburg Sunday Times, the news affected me very emotionally. Andy was my favourite member of the team and we became friends, and must have made an incongruous sight, as he was more than a foot taller than me, but his vitality and sense of humour have remained with me for more than three decades, also the memory that although he must have been bitterly disappointed at not being selected for the tests because of Mervyn Davies who must have been one of the best no. 8's of all time, he never allowed his disappointment to affect him, but remained

the bright affable, gentle giant that he always was. During the past 36 years I have often thought of Andy with admiration and affection, I was not surprised to read the glowing tributes to Andy not only as a sportsman but the man he became all during his life, and of his courage and brightness to the end. I would be grateful if you could e-mail an address to which I could express my deep condolences to Andy's wife Elizabeth and family, failing which I would be grateful if you could pass on these condolences to them.



He was an exceptional Sevens player and won the inaugural World Cup Sevens with England at Murrayfield in 1973, running the length of the field to score, and he master-minded the Barbarians historic victory in the 1981 Hong Kong Sevens. It was Andy who first took a Rosslyn Park side to the “Sunshine Sevens” at East Grinstead RFC, his local club. It was, and still is, in aid of blind charities and there was a big cheque for the winners. Park won, and – without a word to the Committee - Andy went up to collect the prize and promptly donated it to the charity!

In 1980 Andy found time to appear in the BBC TV “Superstars” programme, which he famously won. He gave the £8,000 prize to the RFU. “I reckoned that once I paid tax on it, I would be lucky to buy a second-hand Mini,” he said. In fact, he also knew that, as an amateur, the RFU would regard this as rugby-related earnings and he could well have been banned from the sport he loved.

He led Rosslyn Park to two Cup Finals at Twickenham and, with the advent of League Rugby, saw Park promoted to the top Division (then League One) at the first attempt. Park were still in the top flight when he retired from Rugby Union in 1989 at the age of 41.

Park's skipper in 1983/84, **Toby Allchurch**, contributed the following memory of Rips: The late great Andy Ripley has at last heard the final whistle in his match against prostate cancer, which had been going on since he was first diagnosed in 2005. After remission in 2007, the disease returned in 2008 and early this year reached his skull and destroyed the optic nerves, making him blind. I have seen few more shocking sights than the photos of him receiving his OBE from Prince Charles a few weeks ago.

He recruited me via Tony Rodgers from Cambridge University to join him at Rosslyn Park in 1982. Despite later being given the job of “modernising” the club and replacing him, he was a kind friend to me.

Rippers was in his athletic pomp and at the peak of his powers in the mid-70's whilst I was in my mid-teens and although as a wing forward I tried more to emulate Tony Neary, I remember being in awe of Rips' speed which was so extraordinary for a tall (6ft 5in) man.

### Exuberant

Of course it was his exuberant personality and absolutely unique attitude to life that made him the first “rock star” or “hippy” rugby player with a pre-celebrity, celebrity profile. He seemed to enjoy appearing in the Daily Mail on his motorbike, dressed in pinstripe suit with hair below his shoulders on his way to his banking job in the City. I fact, I think he loved creating paradoxes: being a qualified accountant but looking like a hippy, sounding like St Francis of Assisi but being no pauper and a director of several businesses. I remember he enjoyed poetry and during training one night suggested a new form: the surrealist haiku, which he then

How many of them can you recognise now? Action from the 1975 Cup Final at Twickenham - Rips is second head from the left



***"A great player who lived his life and fought his fight with true heroism and great panache. What a star. Rest well". - Leicester RFC website***

demonstrated to a bewildered line-out.

I first met him whilst I was in my last year at Cambridge being coached by Tony Rodgers and Phil Keith Roach (later England forwards' coach under Clive Woodward). As you know, they were both members - with Rippers - of the pre-professional 1977 Rosslyn Park team which marked the high point of Park's 130-odd year history by being amongst the top three clubs in the country and getting to the final of the John Player (national knock-out) cup competition. He invited me to play for Park against Coventry whilst still at Cambridge and - typically Ripleyesque - instructed everyone in the changing room beforehand that "in today's match we will all call each other "Toby", to make Toby feel at home".

Needless to say, with such embarrassing flattery - and a telephone call to me in Denver in August 1982 to remind me of pre-season training - I became a Rosslyn Park team mate in September 1982 and Captain the following season. After the glory years of the 70's I was given the job of "modernising Park", which to me meant; a) replacing that era's stalwarts such as Phil KR (then 40) and Rippers himself (then 36) and; b) trying to update the blazer-encrusted off-field decision-making. It is only with the hindsight of decades that I now realize it was an impossible task, at least for me. Certainly, I could not combine the job with trying to gain an England cap in competition with Peter Winterbottom.

Although (god bless him) Phil was ready (after nearly 20 years, 10 as Captain) to go, Rippers was certainly not ready to stop "being Andy Ripley", and whilst I never found a replacement at no. 8, he didn't support me with the committee as I hoped.

Despite disappointments on both sides, he did not treat me as "the opposition" as some at Park did and I grew to love him as more than "Andy Ripley the performer". He could be both endearing and infuriating at the same time. Once, we were playing in a televised match away against Wasps in the cup. I had come off with an injury, so Andy had inherited the Captain's job. The opposition were awarded a penalty kick which the referee indicated had been missed. Despite this, and in the face of his aghast team-mates and supporters, Andy ran over to the referee and explained his mistake. The ref reversed his decision and awarded Wasps the three points, which they accepted gratefully and went on to win the match (luckily by more than 3 points). As Rippers said serenely afterwards, "its all part of God's rich tapestry, Toby."

I will never forget his kindness in agreeing to speak at my first rugby club's annual dinner despite the fact it was mid-week and in Worcestershire. This meant going up from London on the train to Birmingham and staying overnight at my parent's house in Redditch. Of course, he was charm personified in both environments and I could easily see why he enjoyed "being Andy Ripley" outside Rosslyn Park.

Much has been said in the published obituaries of Andy's athletic prowess on and off the rugby field and his creation of the "Andy Ripley public persona" but I believe he was a greater man in person than in public. I will always treasure the words he wrote that have almost become his epitaph: "Dare we hope? We dare. Can we hope? We can. Should we hope? We must. We must because to do otherwise is to waste the most precious of gifts, given freely by God to all of us. So, when we do die, it will be with hope and it will be easy and our hearts will not be broken . . ."

But I will also treasure - possibly more - the memory of his generous friendship in difficult circumstances, when I was trying to change something he loved. I'll also never forget the last time I saw him. It was twenty years later, and I bumped into him when he had other things on his mind: on the morning his family was celebrating the award - from the Duke himself at Buckingham Palace - of the gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award to his son. Andy took a second, smiled and said hello, as if it was the day after training.

## The Legend

Park prop, **Paul "Ape" Essenheigh** recalls an incident that reflected Andy's standing in the game: "My memory of Rip's was one of my early games for Park away to Liverpool St Helens, their 2<sup>nd</sup> row took a swing at andy in a line out, and it all kicked off, after a cascade of whistles the ref called the two of them over and warned them that any more and they would leave the field, he then promptly pointed to the Liverpool player and said "Don't you ever punch Mr Ripley again". Total respect for the legend. Fond memories RIP'S"



Another member of that great Park side, **Tim Hyde**, recalls Andy's personal kindness: "Back in about 1983/4 on a dark and wintery Thursday night, I wondered down to Rosslyn Park for the first time to see if I might get a game that Saturday. As I entered the club and approached the bar, I was intercepted by the great Andy Ripley Esq, who asked my name and proceeded to welcome me to the club. He was thus the first Rosslyn Park player I ever met, and to be welcomed to the club by such a legend (and one of my schoolboy heroes) was indeed very exciting. I immediately decided to join the club.

"I was subsequently lucky enough to play with him throughout the 1980's, and it was a privilege to do so. However, it was the help that he gave me off the pitch that I shall remember him for. I have never forgotten the kindness and thoughtfulness he showed me when my career was in its infancy, and the help and advice he gave to me through the years. The patience he demonstrated whilst trying to explain some basic accountancy to me was truly remarkable, especially as we both knew very early on that his efforts were doomed to failure. Rest in Peace Andy - you were much loved and will be greatly missed".

Former 1st XV Team Manager **David Foulds** recalled an incident at Waterloo which illustrated that - despite his anti establishment image - Andy was a stickler for the conventions of the sport he graced. Fouldsie's son, Stephen, was playing in the Park second row against Waterloo, who fielded the notorious "hard man" prop Jim Siddall. During the match, a not entirely accidental boot from the prop caused a prone Park player to spill a lot of blood. When the sides left the field, Jim Siddall went to shake an incensed and disgusted Stephen's hand, who told him to "\*\*\*\* off". To skipper Ripley, it was a fundamental of Rugby Union that 'what goes on the field stays on the field', and he said, "Stephen, you must go into the other dressing room and shake that man's hand". He did, such was Ripley's personal standing.

**The Rosslyn Park website on a typical day gets around 20,000 "hits" - in the 36 hours after Andy's death was announced it recorded 300,000 hits.**

**Roddy Golightly** was 1<sup>st</sup> XV Secretary towards the end of Andy's long and distinguished career with Park and recalls, "Having become 1st XV Team Secretary in November 1986 my first memory of Andy was my first game away at Moseley. In the coach as we left Birmingham came Andy's voice singing very loudly "Roddy Golightly, new kid in town, everybody loves him, when he's not around!" No one laughed louder than I and after that I never looked back and had the pleasure of looking after Andy and all the great guys of that era. as did Colin Horgan and Tony Murphy. Never once did I hear Andy complain about anything, he was never demanding either on training nights or before and after matches. He understood what the backroom staff had to do and supported us.

"I don't remember the year but it was a Divisional match between London and the North at Wasps and Bill Beaumont strolled to a line -out and spotting Andy watching from the touchline called out "Well done Rips - you've cracked it!" Andy just smiled - he had just become a dad - with the birth of his son Marcus. Future generations will remember Andy if not for his deeds on the rugby field but because he was a man among men, a big man with an even bigger heart. I count myself proud and privileged to have known him".

There was pretty well no sport that he could not turn his hand to: a champion triathlete, he reached the semi-finals of the 400 metres in the AAA championship in 1978. He once ran a 400m in 49 seconds, was a top 10-ranked British 400m hurdler, competing against the legendary Ed Moses on one occasion. Journalist **Steven Downes** recalled, "I first met Andy Ripley more than 25 years ago, when he turned up at Tooting Bec track and raced the 400 metres hurdles for Polytechnic Harriers.

It was the event that Alan Pascoe used to do for Poly. But here, in a decent standard British League second division match Ripley, by then in his late 30s, took on the "man-killer" event in his typical, swashbuckling style. From very close up, it was almost frightening to watch. Apparently with very little specific training (or, it might be said, hurdling style), Ripley charged boldly at each of the 10 barriers, the natural long stride of the 6ft 5in-tall former England rugby forward carrying him over the first six or seven flights, his sheer power, tenacity and grim determination leaving wreckage after the final couple of hurdles. Ripley won that race. By sheer force of will, he got himself ranked in the country's top 10 for the event when a decade or more past what ought to have been his athletic peak".

He won four world titles in the masters category at the world indoor rowing championships and is the world record holder over 2,000m. He was a qualified canoe instructor and skilled at basketball, tennis and water-skiing. Sailing featured somewhere on the Ripley CV, and after retirement from rugby he was a more than useful club cricketer with Doransland CC and a stalwart of the local cycling club. At the age of 50 he gained an MPhil at Cambridge University and even reached the final trial for a place in the Boat Race crew. In 2005 he won at Henley with the Tideway Scullers School Veterans Eight. He became President of Tideway Scullers School.



He combined these protean sporting achievements with a successful business career: as deputy general manager of the United Bank of Kuwait. Typical Andy: he arrived for work on his motorbike wearing a bowler hat and carrying a rolled umbrella! He also worked for Midland Bank, Hungarian International Bank and Citibank. A Chartered Accountant, he the Dart company for training accountants and another, Incredibly Fit Co, for marketing rugby gear. He held a number of directorships, including of Esprit health clubs in London. A fluent linguist, he even tried his hand as a rugby commentator for French television.

In 1985 he published Ripley's Rugby Rubbish (1985), a typically eccentric collection of musings and pictures – there are copies in the Park bar with mocking captions. Ripley appeared on the BBC's Wogan programme to plug his book, which he dismissed as a "load of twaddle" and he gave the profits away, this time to the NSPCC.

## President Ripley

Andy accepted the Presidency of Rosslyn Park in 1990 and – truth be told - was too rich a mix for some committee members, who got more than they bargained for! For instance, what to do when your President turns up for the Annual Dinner, not only devoid of black tie but on his motorbike, clad in jeans and a T-shirt saying: "I ate before I came." He was not the first Club President to organise a giant raffle, but who else would have come up with the first prize: a juke box!!

Andy, on being made Club President



Park's demise from the top flight saw the team lose every match, except for a solitary draw away with London Irish. Those were the days when you got 2 points for a win and 1 for a draw. The Ripley T-shirt machine roared into action with a special edition: "Rosslyn Park – the club with a point".

When the English domestic game turned professional in 1996, Rosslyn Park stayed amateur and Ripley reportedly pined for what was being lost. In an interview with the London Evening Standard, he was quoted saying, "Friendship and loyalty have been smashed, Rugby has lost its heroes. I want to have heroic figures out there. If they're chasing a few quid like me I don't like it. It devalues them. It means they are mario-nettes, puppets, manipulated by people with money." He went on to admit he was a "nostalgic, sentimental old buffer". In fact, Andy's views on professionalism were not as black and white as that article painted.

Whilst the Standard story is almost certainly accurate, it doesn't fully reflect Andy's views. He often said that he felt lucky to have played in the era he did, with the cavalier approach and the lasting friendships, but he also said that he felt the game had become far more entertaining as a spectacle than when he played. Although Andy's own Corinthian spirit was often mentioned in the same breath as Park's decision to remain amateur, his attitude was slightly more ambivalent inasmuch as he thought there might be room for a few elite teams to go fully professional, but that the rest would probably be best served by remaining essentially amateur.

But he went further than that. Before Sir John Hall bankrolled Newcastle to set off the explosion that brought down Richmond and London Scottish among others, Rips brought down to the club a business contact who might have been interested in injecting sufficient cash to ensure that Park were one of the elite. Nothing came of it for reasons that were nothing to do with Andy, so no more was said for fear it might split the club. This may come as a surprise even to some who were on the Committee at the time. The writer, alas, remains bound by an oath of secrecy as to exactly who was involved, and it is mentioned here in passing only because one does not want it to pass into history that Andy was resolutely opposed to professionalism, much as he mourned the passing of amateurism. It was more complex than that.

## Park it

Even then, well after retirement from playing, Andy could create a stir just by turning up for a match: Irish fly-half **Paul Dean** recalled recently in The Irish Times. "A few years ago, he arrived in Dublin on two wheels (a motorbike) on the day before the Ireland-England match from a holiday on the Continent. He was covered in flies and very dirty when he pulled up outside the Shelbourne hotel to be met by Jimmy, the impeccably dressed head porter. "Sir! You can't park here," he called out. Andy tossed him his keys and said: "I'm staying here, my good man. You park it."

When asked on a Radio Five Live show whether he had ever done anything completely mad, Rips' pause was probably due to the rich material he could mine an answer from. But he plumped for giving it all up in the late 1990s to return to University, going to Cambridge where he

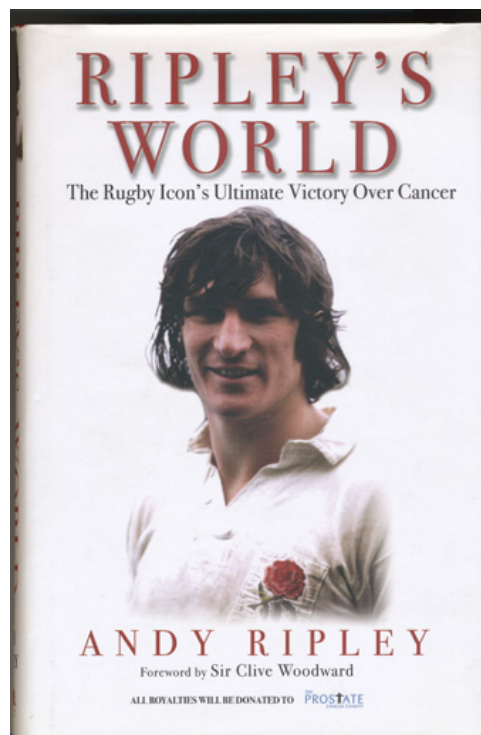
**“Worry will not rob tomorrow of its sorrow but will steal the happiness from today”. - AJ Cronin, quoted by Andy as he fought cancer**

emerged with an M Phil and - at 49 - reached the final round of 28 for a place in the boat race crew. No one else was even half his age!

Andy worked for charities well before his illness, including the Sport Aid Foundation, the Bristol Sporting Association for the Disabled and the Aston Charity Trust for Homeless People. He cared about people. On the Lions tour the squad visited a township. Everyone was back on board the team bus by nightfall, except for Ripley. **Bobby Windsor** remembers, “When he eventually turned up he was wearing nothing but a leopard skin. He'd given away every last bit of his Lions kit - tracksuit, shirt, shorts, socks, trainers - the lot. What a fantastic bloke.” He cared about animals, too. **JPR Williams** recalls from the same tour that, “His long hair and sandals were often frowned upon but he proved to be a second Francis of Assisi, showing remarkable kindness to animals. During the tour, he took two sick kittens under his wing, nursed them back to health with jugs of milk and placed an advert in the local paper offering to give away two 'lion cubs'. The response reduced the team's hotel to a state of bedlam”.

In 2005 Andy was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He threw himself into tireless work for prostate cancer charities and became their star speaker. In 2007 he published his book “Ripley's World”, a moving and entertaining diary of his battle with cancer. On the fly leaf he explains, “It's Thursday 25 August 2005, and because I'm totally self-absorbed, self-interested and probably selfish I've decided to keep a diary. Why? Because two months ago, on Friday 24 June 2005, my consultant urologist at East Surrey Hospital sat me down and told me, “It's unequivocal. You have locally advanced prostate cancer. It's inoperable.” Needless to say, the royalties for the 304 pages that followed were donated to the Prostate Cancer Charity.

The book was so successful that he won an award at The National Sports Club Book Awards at the Café Royal. The Esquire blog takes up the story: “After accepting the award, he made a remarkable speech. At first, he appeared to be rambling. But then, over the course of an un-



scripted and unforgettable 15 minutes, he pulled together the strands of what he had to say to deliver a message that was poetic, funny and moving in equal measure. He had the whole room in the palm of his hand. He left the stage to a long and heartfelt standing ovation. It was the most impressive speech I have ever witnessed and after the lunch I made a point of seeking out Ripley to shake his hand”.

His charity work, along with his sporting achievements, led to his receiving the OBE just 4 weeks before his death. **John Neate**,

Chief Executive of the Prostate Cancer charity, said, “Andy Ripley was an incredible man, he had a huge heart and his generosity and kindness knew no bounds. His work as a Prostate Cancer Charity ambassador was immeasurable. Andy's personality and humour touched the hearts of everyone he met, who heard him speak and who read his words. He will never be forgotten and his unstinting support for this charity has undoubtedly saved the lives of men across the UK.”

He had initially made a good recovery from the disease but it returned in 2008. In an interview in his local paper talking about his illness, Andy said, “The hormone therapy cuts off the testosterone so it means you become much more 'female', I lost the hair from my neck downwards but the hair on my head which was getting quite thin has got much thicker. You also lose muscle mass, you have no libido and you're much more in touch with your feminine side.” The reporter asked whether he had decorated the house pink yet? “No, but I love shopping!”

On 21 May 2010 he received his OBE from Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace. The photo of Andy at the investiture brought tears to many. But if the cancer had taken its toll on his body and weakened his voice, his mind was still razor sharp. Five days later, he was wheeled on stage to be presented with the Blyth Spirit Award by the Rugby Players' Association. The award is given to members who show outstanding courage in the face of adversity. The cancer had already blinded him and from the moment he quipped, “I can't see you all – which is a bit crappy...” he had this battle-hardened bunch eating out of his hand. There was not a dry eye in the house when he received a long standing ovation.

Sadly, three weeks later, Andy passed away on 17 June 2010 at the age of only 62. His hosts that night immediately paid tribute through Chief Executive **Damian Hopley**: “Andy was a colossus, both as an athlete and a human being. His achievements for England and his beloved Rosslyn Park marked him out as one of the most skilful, dynamic and inspirational rugby players of his generation. He will be remembered by many for his success on Superstars, the athleticism and competitive drive that we saw there and in his rowing success that followed underlined his extraordinary ability as a sportsman. Following his diagnosis with prostate cancer, Andy's work raising awareness of the disease amongst men continued to highlight his positive approach to life, and his wisdom, warmth, humour and spirit. We were humbled that Andy and his family were able to attend our awards dinner last month, and I am sure I speak for everyone who attended when I say the memory of that night will remain with us for ever. He was greeted on stage with a standing ovation that lasted well over five minutes, and everyone remained standing as a mark of their admiration and love for Andy. He spoke with his unbreakable spirit about his life, his fight against cancer, and the wonderful friendships and opportunities that rugby had given him. His passing is



Andy undertakes a book signing as part of his work for Prostate Cancer

**The England team wore black armbands in tribute to Andy Ripley prior to the recent Test match against Australia in Sydney.**



It wasn't just copies of his book that Andy was asked to sign, as this 1976 autographed Cup Quarter-Final programme bears witness. Rips clearly could not have known that the (very) young girl that he signed it for would one day surface as Park's head physio! Yes - the signature is for Pippa whose dad, Dave, was wearing the 'M' shirt for Bristol!

Andy Ripley was loved and respected by so many people for so many reasons. When news of his demise broke tributes flowed in from all directions, including people who had hardly known him, but who felt in a strange way touched by him. This was summed up by **Ian Davies** who said, "My link to Andy is exceptionally tenuous but I feel the need to offer a small contribution, whether it is appropriate or not. I was a Colts player back in 1977/78 and on one of the first occasions when getting ready for training - in those days I seem to recall it was one large open changing room. I was sitting there looking around me at all the first team players in those days, Phil Keith-Roach, Bob Mordell, Charles Kent etc when I walked a giant of a man in a long coat, scarf around his neck and wearing one of those old style crash helmets. I had no idea of who or what was underneath all that clothing but slowly but surely as the scarf came off, followed by the helmet and then the coat unravelled the huge man that was Andy Ripley. I had only ever seen him on television playing for England, to say I was in awe is an understatement. Nothing happened, no words were exchanged, and all I have is the memory of being there that day and a story that I occasionally tell. I saw Andy many, many years later at the British Indoor Rowing Championships, which were previously held in Reading, at the Rivermead Leisure Complex that I managed. I never did go up to him and say anything but felt just a connection through that vivid memory."

"I read Paul Kimmage's article in the Sunday Times a few weeks ago and was shocked and deeply saddened by the news and the photograph and, to be honest, I cannot explain why I feel so sad. I am a man of 50 now who has no other than that exceptionally loose connection through Rosslyn Park 30+ years ago and seeing him as international player and competitor on television. Maybe it's because he represents what living a fulfilled life is about, and that life is precious and can be curtailed cruelly. Maybe it's because it represents my past and that seeing an iconic figure like Andy in a different guise, but still displaying courage and fortitude, makes me feel more mortal. Whatever the reason for my sadness I know I cannot explain to myself, my wife or in this e-mail - all I do know is that he was one hell of a player, one hell of an inspiration and, know him or not, I can't help but feel this terrible sadness at his family's, friends' and the club's great loss".

Many Park people have fond memories of Andy. **Graham Lloyd** paid tribute movingly to his friend, "I have desperately wanted to respond to your request for AGR anecdotes but it's like trying to

a great loss to the rugby community, and the world is a duller place without him. We send our deepest condolences to his family. Andy Ripley was, and will remain, one of a kind."

**John Owen**, President of the Rugby Football Union (RFU), said, "It was with profound sadness that I heard of the death of Andy Ripley, who finally succumbed to the dreadful disease which had caught hold of him. In sport there are players who grace their sport on the field of play and those rare few who also transcend their sport off the field. In English and world rugby Andy was definitely in the latter category. On the field he was immense, an outstanding athlete who reached the highest levels of the game. Off the field he was even more impressive with what he gave of himself for others. To be in Andy's presence was to feel truly blessed. His unwavering appetite for life, unceasing enthusiasm for everything and everybody around him and his positive attitude never failed to leave you feeling better about the world around you. His passing will leave a huge hole in our lives and our thoughts are with his family at this sad time."

select a couple of pages from the best book you ever read. So all I can give you is that I feel the loss as keenly as my own blood, and at so many levels: pal, Park player, pal, Park luminary, pal, colleague, pal. Something of the very best of all those has gone with him and we are all the poorer for it. I simply never met a bigger gap between achievement and ego, nor anyone who shared himself so generously. God speed Andy, and thanks for being".

## Respect

**Will Thorogood** said, "So sad to hear of Rips' departure from us. My heartfelt sympathies go out to his family, friends and the Club. As a boy, young man and older man, Andy had my utmost respect as a person and rugby footballer, and he epitomised the essence and spirit of our game and life. One of the reasons I joined Park was because of Rips being here. Although, I never played with him, he knew who I was, as with so many members and players, and always had time to say hello. A "True Gent".

Former Park skipper and Past President, **Tony Tanner**, said, "It was always a great disappointment to me that my rugby career with the Park was cut short due to injury just prior to Andy joining the Club so I was never able to play alongside him in the back row. However he was Chairman during my first presidency and his loyalty and charm were a tremendous asset. We were also fortunate as he was such a whiz with figures that he was able to get us organised to overcome the £40 K deficit we had at the time.

and something for us and visiting players to admire. If you want to start a fund to raise the money for such a monument, I would be very proud to contribute, as I'm sure would an awful lot of current and ex-players of the club. Let us know".

Former Director of Rugby, **Carson Russell**: "What sad news, I bumped into Hugh McHardy today and we were talking about him, fun stories as usual with the standard disbelief of his talents".

Supporter and former Park Touch Judge, **Geoff Dignum**: "God rest Andy Ripley's soul. If his family are agreeable, an event in his memory to

"Way back c1971, through the good offices of the then Park Secretary Peter Thorley, one of the School 7's sponsors were the Midland Bank.

My father Derek asked Andy if he would come and present the prizes to the winners of the final competition. Andy turned up early sporting his usual outfit of jeans, T-shirt and well worn leather jacket and enquired of Dad whether he should borrow a shirt, tie and jacket. My father's reply was that there was no need and anyway if he dressed up no-one would recognise him. It was a great pleasure to be associated with someone who's attachment to Rosslyn Park was as strong as my own".



**Bernard Wiggins** said,

"I only have one anecdote that I can think of, not sure if its worth repetition, but back in the days when Don Yule and I were a double act on Clubcall, Rips came up to me on a regular basis to tell me how much he enjoyed Don and my efforts (which was much appreciated) He told me that he could always tell whether we had won or lost by the tone of my intro to Donald's report.. !!! The reason for mentioning this anecdote was that Rips was just as keen on the club and how it was faring, irrespective of how often he made it down to the club. He will be sorely missed, but I feel sure he will be watching our progress from his heavenly seat".

**Simon Dove** of the Nomads said, "I was very sad to hear of the passing of the great man,

Andy Ripley. I only ever met him once a couple of years ago and only in passing as I squeezed the doorhandles of my car past his Jag in that awful track past the first team pitch. But we shared a few words and in those moments I saw what people eulogise about him. I'm old enough otherwise only to remember him lolloping up the pitch for England and remember clearly him winning Superstars, despite his size. The man receiving his OBE from Prince Charles a few weeks back, I'm sad to say, was a shadow of the man I met and the man he obviously used to be.

"The club should really have some formal monument on site to honour its most famous son. Obviously it is ultimately up to his family, but I think some form of bust or better still, a statue of him in action with ball in hand, in brass, on a granite stone (big solid things, like the man himself), next to the Rovacabin on the first team pitch, watching out onto the pitch to keep an eyes on his successors, would be a great testament to him

raise funds for cancer research would surely be appropriate & well supported".

**Jeremy Clayden** said, "As a long standing ex member of Park. I joined in 1977 and I was 1<sup>st</sup> Team touch judge at Andy's last Middlesex Sevens appearance. I was also fortunate to teach him to breast stroke in the RAC Club Pall Mall pool, in case he needed it his appearances in Superstars. What a lovely gentleman, what a lovely player, I consider myself a better person having met him and am deeply sorry for his wife and family, especially as my father died from the same cause in 1975".

Park man, **Keith Daniels** made contact from Ontario saying, "Like many other Park Members around the world and past and present, I was extremely saddened to hear of Andy's passing. I was a proud member of the CCB XV from 1964 until 1972 when I came out to Canada and joined my "new" Club the Oakville Crusaders. I remember vividly coming to the Park (sorry, I can't get used to the "Rock") one day and saw this tall, gangling fellow in the Bar and was told that this was the answer to all our back row problems. It was not to be long before this statement was proved correct. Andy will be sorely missed".

Andy was loved by team mates and opponents alike. **John Morgan** who played against Rips for Bridgend was moved to write to the Club and say, "Like so many people I was extremely saddened by the news of Andy Ripley's untimely passing. I only met him once, but the meeting is one which I have always remembered fondly, and possibly sums up his warm personality.

"Back in the mid-eighties I was a young player playing for Bridgend RFC. We hosted Rosslyn Park at the Brewery Field and Andy played in the back row against us. At the end of the match we shook hands etc, but I didn't get chance to speak to him in the clubhouse. Rosslyn Park travelled to Bridgend by train, and by coincidence I found myself on the station at the same time when they were returning to London. Andy recognised me from the match and came over to have a chat, and when

the train arrived, invited me to join the Rosslyn Park squad. The journey to Cardiff for me was far too short, Andy was the perfect host, and provided me with a few suitable refreshments!! Throughout our conversations, he never mentioned his incredible rugby achievements, but was more interested in me and my thoughts on the game.

"I grew up watching Andy playing against the strong Welsh sides of the 70's, and didn't really appreciate his playing qualities. In hindsight we can see now that he was far ahead of his time, and would have graced any professional side of today. I am sure that he has had a positive impact on the lives of very many people, and that there will be many more interesting encounters than mine recollected over the coming months. But I would just like to say that I count myself privileged to have met him. Please pass my condolences on to his family".

Two Gloucester supporters also got in touch. **Barry Hook** said, "Sorry don't know the year but I've been going to Kingsholm supporting Gloucester since the 60's. My living memory of Andy Ripley is the head band and flowing locks running down the Grandstand side in a way only Bill McLaren could describe. I will miss him. We (Gloucester) will miss him. The world of Rugby was a better place with him in it. Tonight in this part of the West Country, it is very, very sad, he will be so missed.

**Tony Spear**, also of Gloucester, said, "Very, very sorry to hear the news. I've been a Gloucester supporter all my life, but when I was forced to live in London for a year or two I got a flat in Putney, as I reckoned if I couldn't get to Kingsholm, I could always stroll down to Rosslyn Park and watch Andy Ripley! A truly great player and a complete gentleman. He lit the place up whenever and wherever he played. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him or met him".

**Frank Hopley** said, "Although I'm not a specific follower of Rosslyn Park, Andy Ripley was man who I admired greatly, both as a player in the 70's and later in his work for Prostate Cancer. His high kicking gait and long hair, held back with a head band, breaking away from a scrum is an image that will always remain with me. I remember listening to Andy talk on Radio 5 Live about Prostate Cancer, and how the test is performed. Using fairly basic language (for which the presenter rightly did not apologise,) Andy described the process as uncomfortable, but not as uncomfortable as Bowel Cancer. A man for whom superlatives aren't enough, a true "SUPERSTAR" in all respects. May his legacy be to help eliminate Bowel Cancer and the suffering it brings.

### 100% genuine

In similar vein, **Ian Hancock** (London Welsh) said, "Very sad news. Andy was a 100% genuine rugby man who fought his illness with remarkable courage and good humour. My contact with him was limited to a brief hello in the bar back in the days when we watched London Welsh playing Park. Please pass on my condolences to his family".

Morley man **Dave Winpenny** took the trouble to get in touch to say, "I met Andy on 2 of those visits; as 17 year old school boy I was in total awe of a man who was a hero after the 3 big games for England. He made a real impression on a teenager from an area blighted by the recession. His ability to reach down (he is tall, I am a typical 1970's front row player) and communicate about his love and passion for life, education, rugby and a whole host of things was truly memorable and I remember that short time to this day.

My second meeting with Andy was at the Chinnor match in 2008 on a winter's day when Rosslyn Park gave Chinnor a real lesson in how to play our wonderful game. I was fortunate to sit next to Andy for most of the match and we talked about many things. His understanding of the game was immense and his willingness to debate the strengths and weaknesses of both sides was fantastic. He even had good things to say about my son who was playing in the front row for Chinnor! BUT, it was his battle against prostate cancer and the things he has learnt, challenges he has faced, battle fought and his view of the future that was TRULY inspiring. My short time with him meant that a poor display by Chinnor passed into the memory as being one of those games, but the conversation and camaraderie will be with me for the rest of my life.

I have no other avenue to pass a message to his family, so I would be grateful if you could pass this message on to them so that they can see the impact this mountain of a man had on a young lad from Yorkshire with 2 meetings separated by 30+ years. I am sure he will be missed by more than I and the world is a much smaller place without him".

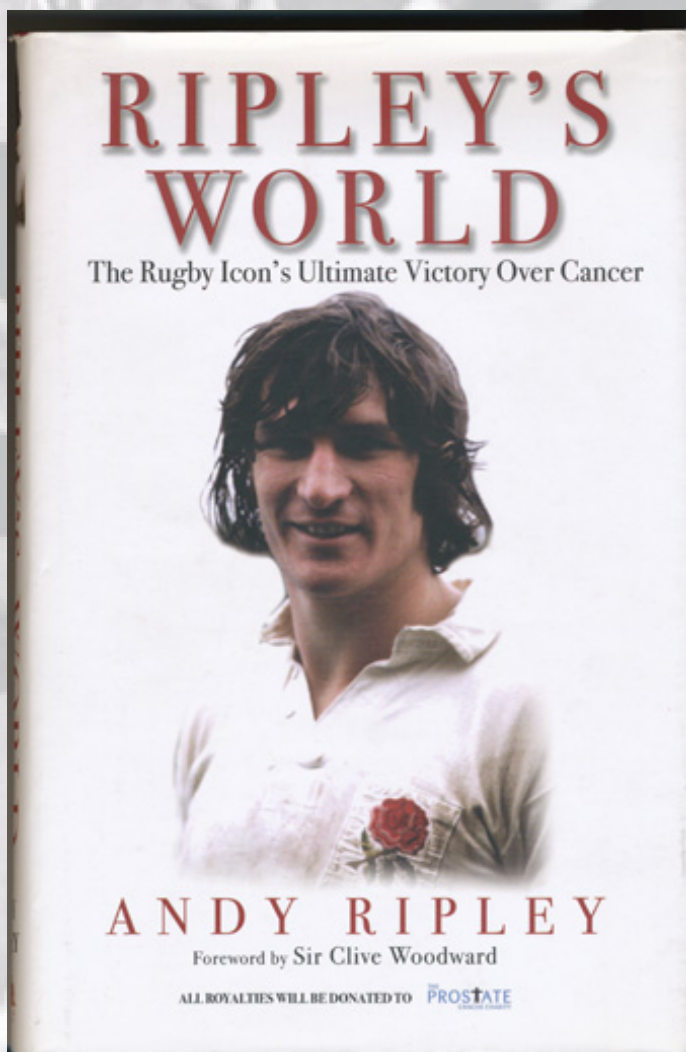
**Fylde RFC** paid the following tribute: "For those of us who grew up in the 1970s watching the great Andy Ripley, the dashing Rosslyn Park & England no 8, with long hair flying and his Corinthian style of play, and who have followed his heroic fight against cancer, yesterday's news of his death at 62 will be incredibly sad. There are few sportsmen who de-

serve the 'great' label but Ripley is up there with the very best. For the measure of the man read Paul Kimmage's piece in the Times written a few weeks before his death "Andy Ripley - the most extraordinary human being I had ever met". This is heartbreakingly sad. A very bright light has gone out".

The tributes continue to flow in but there has to be a deadline somewhere, so apologies if you wrote in and missed the cut off. We shall include those - and any responses / corrections to the stories in this one - in the next Parknews.

Farewell, Andy, you were loved by more people than even you knew.

### BUY THE BOOK



*There could be few better ways of remembering the great man than by buying his book, which manages to be amusing, gripping and moving all at the same time. You can, of course, buy it from your local bookshop or on-line from Amazon. However, you would raise more money for the charity for which Andy wrote it by buying direct from them:*

**The Prostate Cancer Charity**

**First Floor**

**Cambridge House**

**100 Cambridge Grove**

**Hammersmith**

**London**

**W6 0LE.**

**Email: [info@prostate-cancer.org.uk](mailto:info@prostate-cancer.org.uk)**

**A Memorial Service for Andy Ripley will be held on Wednesday 1st December (Andy's birthday) at 2.30pm, at Southwark Cathedral.**